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SUBJECT: Southern Taiwan's Tainan County Agricultural Associations Extend Support to Incumbent DPP Magistrate Candidate

REF: TAIPEI 4405

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. At a recent press conference, executives of Tainan County's farmers' and fishermen associations and the County's thirty-one lower level farmers' associations expressed public support for DPP Tainan County Magistrate Su Huan-chih's re-election bid. The County's grass root agricultural associations, the executives of some of which are incumbent KMT party representatives, traditionally have favored KMT candidates in previous political campaigns. The executives claimed that they shifted their support to Magistrate Su to express appreciation for Su's efforts in seeking financial aid for the county's agricultural associations. A few maintained that their endorsement of Magistrate Su was pro-forma, only to ensure further subsidies. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Thirty-three key executives of Tainan County's farmers' and fishermen associations expressed their support for the incumbent DPP Tainan County Magistrate Su Huan-chih's reelection bid at a press conference held at Su's campaign office on November 9. One of Su's office staff admitted that the press conference was arranged by Su's campaign office and they were happy to have the participation of all the associations' key representatives. Traditionally, Taiwan's grass root farmers' and fishermen's associations were a stronghold of the KMT and the majority of the associations' high ranking executives are long-term KMT members.

¶3. (SBU) Guantien Town Agricultural Association Secretary General, Lin Cheng-jong, who is a senior party representative in the KMT Tainan County Office confirmed that Magistrate Su has been working hard to assist the county's several agricultural associations to resist being merged by the government-run Cooperative Bank, a plan initiated by Ministry of Finance in an attempt to help bail out debt-ridden grass roots credit businesses. Lin went on to say that Su has also assisted the associations to obtain agricultural funding from the central authorities when their businesses met difficulties. Secretary Chang Ping-shan of Yujing Town Agricultural Association said their group's endorsement was because Magistrate Su does not oppose selling the area's mangoes to mainland China despite the lack of a clear central trade policy toward China.

¶4. (SBU) However, Lin complained that Magistrate Su has wasted too many resources on large scale national level projects and failed to work out practical solutions to settle difficulties the area's farmers have suffered. Lin noted that area farmers have criticized Su's promotion of plans to build a national airport in Chiku Town and his implementation of a candy festival, which when held last year generated no real benefit to farmers. Lin went on to say that Mark Chen, Su's predecessor, performed much better in upgrading the County's agricultural environment during his eight-year magistracy. Nevertheless, Lin said their membership still believes that Magistrate Su can do the best job at present, especially since his KMT opponent is less experienced in agricultural issues.

¶5. (SBU) Secretary Chang told AIT/K that the participation of his Secretary General Huang Cheng-ching and himself in the press conference was more pro-forma and less real support (i.e., their endorsement was purposely to ensure further subsidies). Chang said they also showed up at the opening activity of the campaign office of KMT's candidate, Kuo Tien-tsai, and many of the area's association executives did the same thing. In fact, one KMT staff member in Tainan County said that several Associations' representatives had informed the KMT office of their participation and had promised nevertheless to vote for KMT candidates. While that staff member admitted that the endorsement may generate certain influences on the campaign, they are working to minimize the impact on KMT candidates.

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